

OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES

NETWORKING

NETWORKING IS...

- **Contacting people you know and/or don't know** in order to find information about a particular profession, obtain further contact names, information on industries, organizations, career paths, positions, etc., and to build your professional network.
- **Gathering information**, advice and support.
- **A two-way relationship** that helps both parties because of mutual information sharing.

Networking can be the single most effective tool in your effort to find a job or learn more about careers you might enjoy. Studies repeatedly show that as many as 60-80% of job seekers find positions through networking. It is your chance to speak with people who are already in your industry of choice to learn more about their careers and how to develop your own. This activity is powerful because it can give you information you can't find anywhere else, from job opportunities that are not listed to people's perspectives on future trends and what they find satisfying and/or dissatisfying about what they do. This information can then be used to help you find a job or clarify your decisions about the type of job or career you might like.

NETWORKING PREPARATION

First, do your research! Look for information on your chosen career path by searching the web, reading the appropriate professional journals and newspapers, and/or talking to career advisers.

Identify the information you want. Would you like to generate leads on potential jobs, or do you want more general information about an industry or a specific organization?

Determine whom to contact. Once you've determined exactly what kinds of information you are looking for, you can determine whom to contact. You then can get the right information from the right people.

Develop a strategy. Decide which questions will give you the information you need. You'll need to differentiate between the kinds of questions you would be asking during an informational interview from kinds of questions you would ask a potential employer.

WHOM SHOULD YOU CONTACT?

Utilize your relatives, friends and their parents (especially those in the workplace), parents, former employers, co-workers, neighbors, acquaintances, professors' recommendations, deans, peers, and alumni through the SIPA Alumni and Student Network on LinkedIn. Join professional organizations to meet people in the industry you hope to enter.

HOW DO YOU NETWORK?

Make a list of anyone you know who might have information that will help you in your search or who might be able to connect you to those who do. Set up informational interviews, which can be in-person, over the phone or by email. OCS recommends the initial contact should be done through email and then followed up with a phone call.

Be creative about how you network. You may meet people in a variety of settings: conferences, alumni or student events or classes, or through professional networking websites like LinkedIn.

Decide what you are going to say and ask. Explain who referred you and what your present status is — whether you are a student or an alum, as well as your interest in the profession (i.e. hiring trends and required qualifications to enter the field). Prepare questions that you would like to ask about the industry, the organization(s), the individual, the career area, etc.

- **Research** as much as you can about your contact, his/her position, industry and company before calling.
- **Always ask your contact if she/he can recommend other individuals** for you to talk to.
- **Respect** the time of your contact person.
- **Make developing a mutually beneficial friendship your primary goal**, rather than getting something out of it.
- **Send a thank you note** after a successful exchange whether it was in person or by telephone.
- **Contact the person every month** or as frequently as you deem appropriate to report progress and ask for new leads or information.
- **Do not take it personally if people cannot or will not help you.** Concentrate on those who want to help and know how to assist you. Remember this is about relationship building.

ALUMNI/STUDENT RECEPTIONS AND NETWORKING

How to Prepare

- Get list of alumni who will be attending and pick the top 5 of interest to you.
- If possible, write to them in advance to arrange to meet.
- Research the employers they represent.
- Determine how you will identify them at the event.
- Create a list of 3 questions to ask.
- Update your business card.
- Create a shortened version (30 seconds) of your pitch providing an overview of your background and how they could be of help.

Navigating the Reception

- Put your name tag on your right breast pocket.
- Identify your top 5 alumni.
- Introduce yourself with a smile, strong handshake and your pitch.
- Ask your 3 prepared questions - e.g., What do you enjoy about work? How did you prepare for this position? How would you advise me to prepare for a similar position?
- After a few minutes, thank them for their time and ask if you could have their business card to follow up. Smile, shake hands and move on.
- If you mistakenly introduce yourself to an alum not associated with your interests, politely apologize, introduce yourself and ask a brief question - e.g., Have you been to a reception before? I'm looking for _____ and hope you don't mind my moving on.

Follow-up

- Send a thank you email within 24 hours of meeting them.
- If they seem eager to help, keep in regular touch to maintain and strengthen the relationship.
 - Let them know how school and your search are going.
 - Think of ways to be of value to them based on what you learn from your conversation - e.g., email articles or event information that may be of interest to them or introduce them to one of your contacts.
 - Take them out for lunch or a cup of coffee on occasion, if possible and appropriate.
 - Ask for additional contacts.
 - Eventually you may ask them to put in a "good word" for you if you apply for a job with their employer - i.e., ask their employer to take extra careful review of your resume.
 - Notify them when you do apply for a position in their organization.

NETWORKING VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

How does one utilize social networking sites? Today it is becoming more common for professionals to use networking websites in building relationships and making new contacts. LinkedIn is one such website that is specifically geared towards building professional networks, whereas websites such as Facebook are more social in nature. It is important to conduct yourself with professionalism on all social networking websites, because you never know who might be reading them.

Many employers post positions and look for job candidates through LinkedIn, and potential employers often look up the profiles of applicants who have applied to positions in their organizations. Never forget that networking websites cannot take the place of face-to-face contact gained through networking events and informational interviews. Networking websites are just one of the tools that you should utilize in your professional development.

The following are some basic guidelines on how to utilize a professional networking website:

- First, create a headline that conveys your title, such as "Economic Development Officer at UNDP". If you would like to convey the value you bring to an organization without associating yourself with a specific employer, use a heading that describes your area of expertise, for instance "Sustainability and Energy Efficiency Program Manager."
- Next, build your profile in a way that concisely reflects your professional experience, interests, and ambitions, and include jobs, internships, and extra-curricular activities. Upload a professional photograph to your profile.
 - Once you've worked on your profile, join a few LinkedIn groups. Start with the [SIPA Student Alumni and Student Network](#) group.
 - The next step is to build your network by connecting with people who share your professional interests and goals. It is important to be selective with whom you choose to invite into your network; building a network of professional contacts is not about quantity but quality. Your relationship with a contact should be reciprocal and can consist of asking and answering questions, recommending and introducing colleagues, and sharing valuable career-related information. You can also connect with friends and family to gain access to their networks.
 - Use the Skills and Expertise feature on LinkedIn to research profiles that contain the same skills and expertise that you have or those that you seek to develop.

- Research companies and career paths with LinkedIn's Company pages. Follow the organizations for which you would consider working. Many advertise positions on their LinkedIn pages as well as in the Jobs feature.
- Consider using Twitter's job search tools and follow the organizations that interest you.

COMMON OBSTACLES TO NETWORKING AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

You feel uncomfortable: Networking is not asking for favors – it helps both parties! Many of those you contact will be excited to share information and may have helpful suggestions. If you do your research and respect the time of those you contact, you will find networking to be a great tool. Make sure to share your contacts and knowledge as well.

Silences: Create and refer to your list of open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a yes/no response.

Rude responses: Thank the contact and, if necessary, politely leave or end the conversation early.

Lengthy answers: If you are benefiting from the information, let her/him continue. If the information isn't helpful, refocus the interview by stating that you don't want to take too much of her/his time and ask another question from your list.

You stray beyond the agreed upon boundaries: Networking is best used to develop relationships, not to locate job leads. Use networking meetings to gain information, develop further contacts, and seek advice to improve your job search. Once you have established a long-term relationship, you may ask for job leads or recommendations.

You become the interviewee: Restate that your goal is to gain information, and consider thanking the contact for his or her interest in you. However, if a job is presented that sounds good to you, you may choose to be interviewed. In this case it is appropriate to ask more questions about the job, such as what skills or experiences are relevant, before answering interview questions.

Failing to follow-up: Send thank you notes and ask for names of others you may contact.

Poor record keeping: Keep a record of your calls, conversations and meetings. Once you begin to contact a large number of individuals, it may be difficult to recall all this information.

Networking cannot replace research: Research industries, organizations and positions before and after your networking meetings. Your meetings and follow-up will be more productive, as your questions will be more informed and the contacts will know you are serious and wisely using their time. You should have acquired basic information about an employer before meeting with your informational interviewee from that organization.

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